

# THUCYDIDES AND INTERNAL WAR

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## CHAPTER I

### *Beyond Corcyra*

#### CORCYRA

In 427 BCE, the fourth year of the Peloponnesian War, about 250 Corcyreans were sent out from Corinth, where they had been held since their capture in the sea battle at the Sybota Islands at the beginning of the war. They were instructed to return to Corcyra in order to induce the city to break its strategic alliance with Athens and restore its former dependence on Corinth.<sup>1</sup> Strategic realignment implied a change in government, thus the mission well suited these Corcyreans, for most of them had been leading men in their city before their capture and therefore anticipated returning to power. They may also have been ideologically opposed to the pro-Athenian democratic regime which currently governed in Corcyra, but pure ideology was lost in the violent power struggle which followed. At first, the returning Corcyreans tried to effect the change by a legal vote. Envoys from both Athens and Corinth arrived in Corcyra to influence the decision. After consultation with each, the Corcyrean assembly voted to maintain its alliance with Athens.

War, as Thucydides remarked (3.82.2), creates conditions which lead people to act in unaccustomed and violent ways. Defeated in the Assembly, the freed prisoners – whom Thucydides will presently label oligarchs (3.74.2) and their opponents democrats –

<sup>1</sup> The following account is based on 3.70–81.1 with 1.55.1, our only source. Gomme's sensible comment (*ad* 3.70.1) that the prisoners were released "clearly not long before the sedition broke out" was accepted by Gehrke 1985, 89, but rejected more recently by J. B. Wilson 1987 and *CT* 1 *ad loc.* The precise identity of the released Corcyrean prisoners is problematic. Given the circumstances of their capture they had to have had a military function; Bruce 1971, 109 and Gehrke 1985, 89 call them hoplites, but this does not take account of Thucydides' statement that "most of them had been among the most powerful in the city" (1.55.1), an evaluation which *may* not have been made for hoplites (although we know little about the internal organization of Corcyra); they were certainly not rowers, which presumably was the function of the 800 slaves captured and sold in the original sea-battle (*ibid.*).



turned to the courts, charging the democratic leader and Athenian “voluntary *proxenos*” Peithias with conspiracy to enslave Corcyra to Athens; such was the standard rhetoric of this war. On acquittal, Peithias immediately counterattacked with allegations of sacrilege against his five richest accusers, who were convicted and forced to seek refuge in temples. Out of desperation they and their companions launched a violent attack on Peithias and killed him with about sixty other council-members and private citizens. The oligarchs were now in control of Corcyra, and at least temporarily had fulfilled the condition of their release from Corinth; they were joined by like-minded compatriots in the city.<sup>2</sup> They made gestures to dampen popular alarm, but once a Corinthian trireme arrived they felt emboldened to attack the democrats whom they had usurped. The extent to which “the *demos*” at this stage in Thucydides’ narrative included the population at large is uncertain, but in the ensuing *stasis*, when the city became physically divided into rival camps and was nearly burned down in the many skirmishes, the war perforce engulfed the entire population. One sign of the extremism engendered by the conflict is that both sides appealed even to slaves to join their cause (3.73).

As the democrats were prevailing, the Corinthian ship slipped away and an Athenian fleet of twelve ships, carrying 500 Messenian hoplites, arrived. The Athenian commander, Nicostratus, managed to negotiate a peace between the factions, but this soon fell apart. For as he was about to sail away, the Corcyrean democrats persuaded him to leave five of his ships for their own protection, offering five of their own as replacements; on these they planned to embark their enemies, who, however, scented mischief and took refuge in the temple of the Dioscuri. Nicostratus barely restrained the democrats from murdering these suppliants in the temple, and when other oligarchs in the city saw this they fled to the temple of Hera, but were soon removed to a nearby island by the democrats.

A new stage in the *stasis* commenced when the great powers became involved on a larger scale. The arrival of fifty-three Peloponnesian ships threw the Corcyrean democrats into a panic, and

<sup>2</sup> In 3.75.5 the suppliants in the temple of Hera number at least four hundred, which does not seem to include, at least from a literal reading of the text, the suppliants in the temple of the Dioscuri (see Gomme’s comment and Hornblower’s critique, *ad loc.*); five hundred are mentioned in 3.85.2.



the fleet they launched in response was hastily and haphazardly organized, uncoordinated and further hampered by infighting on board the vessels. The twelve Athenian ships managed to save the Corcyreans only by brilliant seamanship. They were spared further attack only by the Peloponnesians' lack of initiative to follow up success. In alarm, the Corcyreans moved their oligarchic prisoners on the island back to Corcyra as a precaution, and temporarily reconciling with the oligarchs they manned thirty ships. But the Peloponnesians never attacked; they abandoned the scene on the approach of sixty Athenian ships under the command of Eurymedon. This induced the democrats in Corcyra to forget the temporary reconciliation and proceed to drastic action against their perceived enemies. As Thucydides tells the story from this point, his narrative of events turns almost imperceptibly into his famous generalized model of *stasis*:<sup>3</sup>

3.81.2. The Corcyreans [= the democratic faction], when they became aware that the Attic ships were sailing towards them and their enemies' ships [= Spartan] were gone, brought inside the city the Messenians who had previously been outside, and ordered the ships which they had manned to sail around to the Hylleic harbor; while these were making their way around, they killed any of their foes they could lay their hands on. And those whom they had persuaded to embark they now removed from the ships and destroyed, then proceeding to the temple of Hera they persuaded about fifty of the suppliants there to undergo a trial and then condemned them all to death. (3) The majority of the suppliants had not accepted the offer of a trial, and when they saw what was happening, started killing each other right there in the shrine; some hanged themselves from trees, while others killed themselves in the way each was able. (4) For the seven days that Eurymedon, after his arrival, remained there with his 60 ships, the Corcyreans massacred those of their own city whom they judged to be their enemies. They brought them up on the charge of attempting to subvert the democracy, but in fact some were put to death merely out of personal antagonism and others with money owed them were killed by their debtors. (5) Death in every form took place, and everything likely to occur in such circumstances happened – and even went beyond: for fathers killed their sons, people were dragged

<sup>3</sup> The translation is based on the OCT. Unconventional renderings will all be explained in the course of the discussion, except for the one defended in the following note. 3.84 is not included, as no modern defense of it is strong enough to overturn both the scholiast's judgment that it is spurious and Dionysius' failure to mention it; see esp. *HCT* II, 382–3; Fuks 1971; Pritchett 1975, 117; *CT* I, 488–9 (but strongly rejecting Fuks' arguments). Maurer 1995 does not defend his belief that 3.84 is genuine (77 n. 35).



from temples and killed beside them, and some were even blockaded in the temple of Dionysus and perished there.

(82.1) Such was the degree of savagery which the *stasis* reached, and it seemed even more so because it was the first of that time (to reach such an extent),<sup>4</sup> whereas later practically the whole Hellenic world was disturbed (by *stasis*), there being contentions everywhere between the democratic leaders who tried to bring in the Athenians and the oligarchs who tried to bring in the Lacedaemonians. And whereas in peacetime the parties in individual states would not have had the pretext, nor would they have been so prepared to call them in, once they were embroiled in war and an alliance was available to each side for the detriment of their opponents and their own self-aggrandizement in a single stroke, bringing in Athens and Sparta was a facile matter for them as they desired some revolutionary change. (2) Many calamities befell the cities in the course of *stasis*, such as occur and will always occur so long as human nature remains the same, although they will be more intense or milder and varying in form, according to vicissitudes of circumstance prevailing in each instance. For in periods of peace and prosperity, both states and individuals maintain more positive dispositions because they are not compelled to face circumstances over which they have no control; but war is a teacher of violence in that it does away with the easy provision of daily needs and brings most people's passions to match the level of their actual circumstances.

(82.3) So the cities were embroiled in *stasis*, and in those that were afflicted later, the mindset of the combatants, influenced by knowledge of the previous instances, was revolutionized to much further excesses, both in the ingenuity of their attacks and in the enormity of their acts of revenge.

(82.4) And people exchanged the conventional value of words in

<sup>4</sup> διότι ἐν τοῖς πρώτῃ ἐγένετο, despite near-universal opinion, cannot mean "because it was the first of the *staseis*" since there were other *staseis* which preceded this one, at Epidamnus (serving as a *casus belli*), Plataea, Notion and Mytilene. In Chapter 6 I argue that Thucydides had compelling reasons for the placement of the *stasis* model. The words ἐν τοῖς should mean "at that time," contrasted with ὕστερον in the next clause. This still requires expansion, however, because of the problem of the earlier *staseis*: "to reach such an extent" thus seems to be the meaning, especially since Thucydides has just said that the Corcyrean *stasis* exceeded all bounds (καὶ ἔτι περαιτέρω, 3.81.5), and it was indeed more serious than the previous *staseis* in the war. The conflict drew in both the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, and may possibly have been the first time in the war that "democracy" and "oligarchy" hardened into rhetorical weapons in the cities' inner conflicts. The same thing or worse was subsequently repeated in city after city, "influenced by knowledge of the previous instances" (82.3), but the Corcyrean conflict *seemed* the worst because it set the precedent for violence, cruelty, extremism. Connor 1984, 103 n. 61 (with bibliography) rejects the standard interpretation of ἐν τοῖς πρώτῃ, favoring the suggestions "among the first" and "in the first rank among the examples of *stasis*." The clause, however interpreted, ensures that the word στάσις must have a definite article, as Krüger suggested; omitting the η after ὥμῃ was one of the easiest kinds of error a scribe could make.



relation to the facts, according to their own perception of what was justified. For reckless daring was now considered courage true to the party, whereas prudent hesitation was considered specious cowardice, moderation and discretion a cover for unmanliness, and intelligence which comprehended the whole an unwillingness to act in anything. Impulsive rashness was attributed to the part of a real man, while prolonged planning with a view to safety was written off as a nice-sounding excuse for evasion. (5) The one who exhibited violent anger was always considered reliable, anyone who spoke against him was suspect. The one who succeeded in a plot was thought intelligent, but shrewder still was the one who suspected a plot was brewing; yet the one who took precautions to obviate the need for both plotting and suspicion was a destroyer of the faction and terrified of the opposition. In general, both he who anticipated another who was about to do some evil, and he who incited to evil someone who had no such intention, were applauded.

(6) Moreover, blood ties became more alien than factional interest, because the latter made for a greater willingness to take risks without prevarication; for such associations were formed not for mutual benefit in conformity with established laws, but for greedy pursuit in violation of convention. Pledges among partisans were confirmed not so much by the sanction of divine law as by their shared transgression of the law. (7) Fair proposals from the opposition were received with actual protective measures by the faction which felt itself to be superior, and not in a noble spirit. Revenge was valued more than avoiding injury in the first place. Oaths made in support of any reconciliation had only momentary validity, as they were made by each side only in the absence of any other source of strength to get out of an impasse; but whoever found the opposition off-guard at a given moment and seized the first opportunity for a bold strike, enjoyed a revenge sweeter for having exploited good faith than winning in an open fight, and such a one calculated the advantage both of the safety of such a course and of the accolades for intelligence to be won for having scored victory through guile. The majority (in *stasis*), being malfeasants, accept the title "clever" more willingly than the title "stupid" if they were good, and they are ashamed of the latter and glory in the former.

(8) The cause of this entire condition was the hunger for power inspired by greed and personal ambition, and from these resulted the zeal for victory once they were engaged in the conflict. For the faction leaders in the various cities used specious names on each side – professions of "political equality for all under the law" and "wise and temperate government by the best" – and while paying lip service to the public interest in fact made it their prize, and using every available means in their competition to get the better of each other they ventured to perpetrate the worst atrocities and went to even further extremes in executing revenge: they did not restrain themselves at the boundary of justice or the



city's true interests, but limited their actions only by what their own immediate gratification required, and they were ready to satisfy their lust to dominate by seizing power either through an unjust vote of condemnation or through brute force. As a result, both sides abandoned all religious scruple but admired rather those who managed to accomplish some invidious act under the cover of a specious phrase. Citizens who maintained neutrality were destroyed by both sides, either for their refusal to join in the fight or out of envy of their survival.

(83.1) Thus every form of wickedness arose in the Hellenic world because of the *staseis*, and that simple goodness which is a major part of nobility was derisively mocked out of existence, while the ranging-up of opposing camps on the basis of mutual distrust prevailed far and wide. (2) For no word was reliable enough, nor any oath formidable enough, to bring about reconciliation, and all who found themselves in a superior position, figuring that security could not even be hoped for, made provisions to avoid injury rather than allow themselves to trust anyone. (3) Those with a weaker intellect for the most part survived since they rushed precipitously into action, fearing that both their own deficiencies and their opponents' intelligence would cause them to be worsted in an argument of words and, as a consequence of their opponents' versatility of intellect, be outstripped in plotting. (4) On the other hand, the others contemptuously presumed that they would foresee any danger and had no need of practical steps when they could use their intellect to deal with all contingencies, and so with their defenses down they were more frequently the ones destroyed.

#### A MODEL OF *STASIS*: PURPOSE AND METHOD

The analysis of *stasis* contains Thucydides' own fullest, most concentrated and profoundest reflections on historical truths.<sup>5</sup> Most other comments on the human condition in the *History* are contained in the speeches and the Melian Dialogue, from which the historian's own voice cannot be reliably recovered. In his study of *stasis*, we hear Thucydides' voice clearly, and we find, as in only a few other places in the *History* – e.g., the Archaeology and his description of the epidemic in Athens – indications of his own deeply held convictions on historical processes not connected exclusively to the Peloponnesian War, or any particular time or place.

<sup>5</sup> The most sustained treatments of the passage as a whole are Gomme's and Hornblower's commentaries, Wasserman 1954, Macleod 1979, Loraux 1986b, Orwin 1988 and 1994, 175ff. On the meaning of the Greek word *stasis* and its distinction from other terms like *polemos emphylios*, see Gehrke 1985, 6–8, a work now essential to any study of the topic, and Loraux 1987.



The language of the passage is perhaps the most difficult in the entire work. Native Greek speakers in antiquity had trouble with it, and modern interpretations vary to an absurd degree. Yet Thucydides chose each word with great care, and constructed each sentence with great precision. He tried to pack large and complex thoughts into a small space, not in order to be obscure or perverse but to impart both force and elegance to his ideas. The ideas he attempted to convey strained the capacity of ancient Greek.<sup>6</sup> The result is a style which resembles poetry in its compression and power. For the serious reader, close and patient scrutiny of detail is the only way to unlock Thucydides' thought.

The narrative in 3.81–2 passes from the single instance of a closely observed and carefully recorded *stasis* at Corcyra in 427 to a generic description of all *staseis*, a *model* for both the present war and all time. The transition from the particular to the general is unannounced, and the seam is hardly noticeable. The later book- and chapter-divisions, which should never be used as a guide to interpretation, are misleading here, for the model does not begin abruptly at 3.82.1. Universal elements are already suggested while the focus is still on Corcyra (3.81): treachery, internecine slaughter, lethal subversion of judicial process, violation of religious places and sanctities, personally motivated crime masked by political pretext, atrocities of every form defying imagination (πᾶσα ἰδέα) – these are all standard features of a *stasis*, stereotypical behavior, things which are “likely to occur in such circumstances” and which Thucydides will refer to and comment upon in the more generalized treatment that follows.

The model has a double function. First, it will serve as a narrative substitute for all *staseis* mentioned in the course of the *History*. The internal conflicts during the greater war, Thucydides says, followed the general patterns described, even if every detail was not precisely repeated. The previous *stasis* at Notion (3.34), for example, is told in briefest form, and the later civil conflicts at Rhegion (4.1.3), Leontini (5.4.3) and Messene (5.5.1), to name just three, are mentioned only in passing. The reader may refer to the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Wasserman 1954, 53: Thucydides “has to work with a linguistic raw material not yet fully ready to express the rational and emotional concepts and overtones of political and psychological phenomena.”



model to fill in some of the major features of these other conflicts and in general assume that the combatants in each instance behaved according to the patterns described in the model.<sup>7</sup> This is a variation of a known narrative technique of Thucydides, by which he relates one instance of a recurring event in great detail so that it may serve as an exemplar for all similar instances in the narrative.<sup>8</sup> For example, the vivid detail of the siege of Plataea in Books 2 and 3, and the battle at Mantinea (5.65–74), serve as models for sieges and hoplite battles, respectively. The difference in the case of *stasis* is that, by describing one typical episode in detail, Thucydides intended to create an abstract model for an event which will recur not only in the Peloponnesian War, or even any war in Greek history, but all human history. This is the second purpose of the *stasis* model: to serve as a diagnostic (but not prognostic) prototype for observers of *stasis* in the future. While the battle at Mantinea exemplifies a peculiarly Greek style of warfare, Thucydides understood *stasis* to be a phenomenon which would recur in substantially the same form in other times and places, so long as human nature remained the same (3.82.2). Thus he focused his sharp eye not on specifically Hellenic features, but on more general aspects of developed human society – language, family ties, and political, legal and religious conventions. This will ensure intelligibility for future readers.

The *method* is implied in the purpose and revealed in the exposition: pertinent details are rigorously selected and accurately defined to provide the basis for precise yet generalizing interpretations of human behavior. The *stasis* model is a good demonstration of the principle of strict and accurate observation enunciated by Thucydides in his two famous methodological statements, one at the beginning of the *History*, where he claims to have investigated every detail “as accurately as possible” (1.22.2), and the other in the so-called “second introduction”: “I was at an age to understand what I observed (αἰσθανόμενος), and I directed my mind to an accurate ascertainment of what happened” (5.26.5). In

<sup>7</sup> We will see in Chapter 6 that other *staseis* are related in considerable detail when they exhibit an important variation, or themselves held special importance in the course of events.

<sup>8</sup> Rawlings 1981, 210–15; Connor 1984, 144; and the illuminating discussion of de Romilly 1956a, 123–79. Solmsen’s chapter (1975) on “rational reconstruction” is relevant in this respect.



both cases Thucydides stresses personal observation (αἴσθησις) and painstaking accuracy (ἀκρίβεια),<sup>9</sup> which are abundantly evident in his account of *stasis*. These two faculties imply a third, which is not explicitly stated but is amply demonstrated in the model: strict selection. Not everything that can be accurately observed is worth recording. While “death in every form took place” (3.81.5) and “every form of wickedness arose” (3.83.1), the degree or number of these forms – which Thucydides cannot, or sees no reason to catalogue entirely – should not mislead the identification or understanding of the underlying condition. On a larger scale, the “form” (ἰδέα) of the entire *stasis*: Thucydides notes that later outbreaks of *stasis* in the Peloponnesian War, like episodes in a widespread epidemic, were more severe than the first ones (82.3); they should not be mistaken as a different condition because of this difference.

Thucydides’ declarations of method and their application in the *stasis* model reflect the intellectual trends and discoveries of his day. The investigations of the physical and biological world during the fifth-century “Greek Enlightenment” centered on close, meticulous observation of nature, followed by rational analysis of and deduction from the observed phenomena.<sup>10</sup> This is the approach Thucydides takes to the raw data of human history, or more specifically certain recurring episodes in history like *stasis*. His method has most often – and most usefully – been compared to that described in the literature of the new medicine (τέχνη ἰατρική), which was the least speculative, most empirical science

<sup>9</sup> See the Hippocratic work *Ancient Medicine* 9, 12 for αἴσθησις and ἀκρίβεια; for ἀκρίβεια in Thucydides, cf. Trédé 1983, and now Crane 1998, 38ff.

<sup>10</sup> For Greek rationality, one should start with the Hippocratic work, *On the Sacred Disease* and Aristotle *Met.* 983b 20ff. Among modern treatments of ancient science in general and its empirical and rational aspects in particular, see Guthrie 1962, 26–38; Lloyd 1979 and 1987; and for a convenient review of the main scientific and philosophical figures in Athens in Thucydides’ time and their influence, Ostwald 1992, 338–69; and see Hornblower 1987, 110–35 on Thucydides’ “intellectual affinities,” esp. 131–5 on medical writers. Naturally, any one-sentence characterization, such as mine above, of emergent scientific method, even only that of medicine, will be insufficient and objectionable, and I do not mean to ignore the complexity and diversity of ancient science, nor some ancient scientist/philosophers’ severe doubts about the reliability of perception (e.g. Parmenides), the alleged lack of quantitative assessment by Greek scientists, and similar issues which, while important, are superfluous to the present investigation; see particularly Lloyd 1979, chapters 1–3 and 1987, chapters 5–6. The superstition and irrationalism which existed and even thrived alongside Greek science (even among the scientists themselves), as well as the excessive uses which the sophists later made of scientific models and methods do not illuminate Thucydides’ historical method as he conceived it.



of that time.<sup>11</sup> The practitioners of the new medicine produced thoroughly detailed records of diseases and their peculiar symptoms, or *tekmeria*.<sup>12</sup> The Hippocratic accounts of diseases were necessarily selective, and therein lay the art (τέχνη). A physician with a trained eye and full knowledge of previously recorded instances was supposed to distinguish symptoms of one disease from unrelated phenomena, as well as understand variations in the symptoms of a single disease among different patients and the various stages of a disease as it progresses. A disease which breaks out in different places and in different times will not appear identical in each case; a competent physician discerns the underlying similarities and disregards surface variations.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in his account of *stasis*, Thucydides describes how the condition “befell” or “afflicted” the cities (ἐπέπεσε)<sup>14</sup> and how it “progressed” (προухώρησε), using words which medical authors used to describe the development of disease.<sup>15</sup> His account will necessarily be selective: the calamities of *stasis* “will be more intense or milder and varying in form” (εἴδεσι), according to varying circumstance (82.2):<sup>16</sup> fluctuations in the outward manifestations of the underlying disease should not fool the experienced observer.

One should not overwork the comparison between the nascent medical science of the time and Thucydides’ historical method. A technical medical glossary, in the modern sense, had not fully de-

<sup>11</sup> Hankinson 1992. Major discussions of the intellectual influences, particularly medicine, on Thucydides include Cochrane 1929, J. Finley 1942, esp. 67ff., Weidauer 1954, Lichtheim 1965, Longrigg 1992; and now Rechenauer 1991 and Swain 1994, both of whom can be consulted for the mass of previous literature (Rechenauer is oddly absent from Swain’s extensive citations).

<sup>12</sup> This is the word Thucydides uses elsewhere for indications of certain facts or findings, thus his use of the word does not correspond *literally* to “symptom” but reveals the same use of evidence and mode of analysis as Greek science, particularly medicine; see Hornblower 1987, 100ff.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Phillips 1973, 28ff. The problems with Thucydides’ selectivity and use of evidence in other parts of the *History* are well known, see Hornblower 1987, chapters 2 and 4, and below, pp. 210ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the use of the word in connection with the epidemic, 2.48.3, 2.49.6, 3.87.1.

<sup>15</sup> *CT* 1, 480; Swain 1994. The word ὥμῳς is also a favored word in the Hippocratic corpus, as Hornblower points out. For paradoxical elements in the choice of ὥμῳς and προухώρησε, see Connor 1984, 103.

<sup>16</sup> εἶδος (and the closely related ἰδέα) in Hippocratic literature was used to distinguish different indications of the same general phenomenon, see Weidauer 1954, 21ff. and *CT* 1, 173–5 (brief but excellent). For Thucydides’ use of the word, see 2.50.1, 51.1, cf. 47.4, 48.3; also 1.109.1, 3.98.3, 7.29.5. Flory’s argument (1988) that πᾶσα ἰδέα in Thucydides is an expression of hyperbole and contradicts Thucydides’ expectations regarding the war misses the point.



veloped by Thucydides' day; there is nothing *exclusively* medical about Thucydides' words translated as "afflict," "progress" and "form" in the *stasis* model.<sup>17</sup> The comparison has been suggested, of course, because of Thucydides' clear demonstration of medical knowledge in his description of the epidemic at Athens (2.47.3–2.54). In that passage, vocabulary and modes of expression common in medical texts, as well as his frank avoidance at 2.49.3 of "all the names assigned by doctors" to vomiting, leave little doubt that he was more than casually acquainted with some of the more technical – and by implication, general – aspects of the fledging science.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, his account of the epidemic itself contains the basic principles, modes of description and underlying assumptions of contemporary medical literature: he describes the setting, records the indications and course of the disease in some detail, and notes fatality rates, taking sufficient account of the fact that outbreaks of the plague varied in both magnitude and particulars in different places (cf. 2.47.3, 2.51.1). The account does contain imprecisions and inaccuracies, and not all of the symptoms Thucydides records are relevant;<sup>19</sup> and it is true that the account does not exactly resemble ancient diagnostic accounts, but it should not be expected to. No one should think, for instance, that if the historian's description of the epidemic cannot be slipped in, undetected, between the pages of the Hippocratic work *Epidemics* 1 and 3, it was not influenced by medical literature.

The level of Thucydides' medical skill is not the important question. The extent of Thucydides' medical *knowledge* – or his knowledge of any other science of his day – is not really an accu-

<sup>17</sup> Weidauer 1954; Parry 1969.

<sup>18</sup> Page 1953, accepted by Gomme, fleshed out further by Lichtenhaeler 1965, 34–72; now supported further in a computer analysis by Morgan 1994, 198–9, and argued at length by Swain 1994; see Page 1953, 97 n. 1 on the immense bibliography on this subject already at that point. Parry 1969, in an influential article, rightly criticizes earlier scholars, above all Cochrane and Weidauer, for excessive claims, such as an exact and exclusive correspondence between Thucydides and medical texts, and certain insupportable biographical speculations; yet by offering a semantic adjustment of the word "technical" and citing numerous indisputable but irrelevant examples of poetic phrases and strikingly unusual syntax, Parry refutes an argument which was not made by Page and which should not have been inferred by Page's admirers.

<sup>19</sup> A modern physician (Morgan 1994, 204) has compared Thucydides' description of the epidemic to "the 'head to toe' listing of symptoms and signs gathered by a neophyte medical student when first presented with a complicated diagnostic problem"; in fact, Thucydides omitted or left vague other things which modern doctors would have wanted for a more precise diagnosis.



rate indicator of *methodological and conceptual influence*. He himself disavowed any claim to medical expertise, especially in a case which baffled the experts. The epidemic in Athens was κρεῖσσον λόγου, “beyond explanation,” that is, impossible to identify and overwhelming rational analysis.<sup>20</sup> His purpose was to provide what even experienced medical writers did when at a loss, namely an accurate record (the γνῶσις) of the condition: “I shall describe its actual course, explaining by what indications an investigator, with such foreknowledge of it, might best be able to recognize it should it break out in the future” (2.48.3).<sup>21</sup> This is the method and approach to natural phenomena which Thucydides brought to his description and analysis of *stasis*.

While a tentative and amateur student of medicine, Thucydides was a keen and perspicacious historian. After his account of the epidemic’s most important symptoms, Thucydides wrote with authority and at commensurate length (2.48.1–51.3 vs. 2.51.4–53) about the drastic psychological and social consequences of the epidemic, in terms very closely resembling his pathology of *stasis* (with important differences, discussed below). Historical processes are more complicated than the course of a disease in the human body, yet Thucydides shows no uncertainty when describing and analyzing the cause, course and effects of *stasis*. He chose precisely those features he judged inherent to the condition and described them as accurately and methodically as possible. Thus his rigorous selection of facts, for which he has been severely criticized by modern readers, was the only intellectually honest way to proceed, given his original methodological decisions. Moreover, in the case of *stasis*, Thucydides was able to explain the cause of the affliction, which he was unable to do for the epidemic. For him, *stasis* was not κρεῖσσον λόγου, “beyond explanation,” despite the fact that one of its symptoms is fundamental changes in language.

In his accounts of both the epidemic and the *stasis*, Thucydides differs from the medical experts in at least one important aspect.

<sup>20</sup> Not “impossible to describe,” as some have thought, for Thucydides describes it in some detail, ἐπὶ πάν τήν ιδέαν (2.51.1)

<sup>21</sup> Parry 1969 interprets this sentence as reflecting a non- (or anti-) scientific “pessimism”; yet while it is true that Thucydides did not believe in prognosis, his method was no less “scientific” as a result (see next two notes below). I also cannot agree with Rusten 1989 *ad loc.* that Thucydides’ note that doctors were unable to help indicates his distance from the fledgling medical science. See Rutherford 1994 on the “usefulness” of the *History*.



Nowhere does he intend to provide future generations an instrument for *prognosis*, much less treatment.<sup>22</sup> His programmatic statement in 2.48.3, quoted above, stresses cognition (σκοπῶν, προειδώς, ἄγνοεῖν, ἰδών), nothing more, just like his assertion that the characteristics of *stasis* so carefully described “occur and will always occur so long as human nature remains the same” (3.82.2). No possibility, much less intention of prediction is suggested here, in sharp contrast to the Hippocratic authors. In this aspect, then, Thucydides differs from his medical models, as well as from modern criteria which (for most sciences) require reproducible results fitting a predictable pattern; only his *method* fits the term “scientific.”<sup>23</sup> Even a work such as the Hippocratic *Epidemics*, which offers no explicit guidance for prognosis and seldom suggests treatments but is devoted almost entirely to a detailed account of several afflictions, implies the use of the information as a prognostic instrument.<sup>24</sup> Thucydides writes to impart to future generations no practical benefits other than knowledge itself. This knowledge, if accurately recorded, will help future readers to understand events of their time.

The tasks of recording and understanding were hard enough, as Thucydides acknowledges at the beginning of his *History* (1.22.2–3). Even the author of *Ancient Medicine* thought that “perfect accuracy is to be seen only rarely” (ch. 9), and that the scientist must aim for only “nearly perfect accuracy” (τὸ ἐγγύς τοῦ ἀτρεκεστάτου, 12).<sup>25</sup> Thucydides states his purpose succinctly: “those who wish a clear view (τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν) both of past events and of future events which, given the human condition, will be identical or similar – if these judge my history useful, it will be enough for me” (1.22.4). As a record of the past for future generations seeking

<sup>22</sup> This point was set right by de Romilly 1956a and in fairly strong terms by Parry 1957 and 1969, 106ff., although they have not always been heeded since. See Stahl 1966, 15–19, and the critique of Lichtheim 1965, 151ff. by Rivier 1969; and Hussey’s view (1985, 134) that Thucydides prescribed a cure for *stasis* (!).

<sup>23</sup> Syme 1962, 139: “the notion of scientific history is an absurdity unless by ‘scientific’ we simply mean being as accurate and comprehensive as possible.” While some modern sciences rely more on reproducibility and predictability than others (biology and physics vs. geology and astronomy), all assume regular patterns resulting from laws of nature. On “scientific history” in modern practice, see Evans 1997, 45–74.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. now Grmek 1989, 292–5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. also the statement, which sounds so much like Thucydides in thought if not style: “Everything will be discovered if the researcher is competent and makes his inquiry by starting out from knowledge (εἰδώς) of the discoveries already made” (ch. 2).



knowledge about both the past and their own time, Thucydides' *History* will be a κτήμα ἐς αἰεί, a "possession for all time," permanently "useful." Thucydides is dealing with historical truths, which are more susceptible to investigation than the nature of the gods or men's souls or a supersensible reality of Nature, or even the physical nature of the universe.<sup>26</sup>

Two more points should be made before closing this discussion of Thucydides' method in the *stasis* model. First, we should take account of the learned controversy on the question: to what extent did Thucydides, under the influence (the spell, some would say) of science, actually write his entire *History* according to the same principles declared in 1.22.2 and 5.26.5 and demonstrated *par excellence* in his accounts of the epidemic and *stasis*, and consequently to what extent can he and his entire composition be considered objective and rational? The scholarship on this question is so massive as to daunt even the most enthusiastic reader of Thucydides. The debate as such began when the view of an utterly truthful, precise, detached and rational Thucydides, developed primarily by German scholars in the nineteenth century, was challenged in 1907 by Cornford, whose thesis is implied in the title of his book, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*. Cornford was answered by Cochrane (1929), who in the English-speaking world has remained the best-known representative of the view that Thucydides applied to history the scientific method of his time, particularly that developed by the medical experts, thus inventing "the science of history." Cochrane's argument, while suffering from both excess and error, rests on the essentially correct observation that Thucydides learned much about method and technique, and approach to nature, from the science of his day, and was the first to attempt – or presume – to apply what he learned to history. A distinction must be made between how Thucydides thought or said he was writing history and what later scholars identify as his real method and purpose, or his success in maintaining "objectivity" in modern terms. If an unequivocal demonstration of *adopted method* and *intended purpose* is recognized in the *stasis* model, that will suffice for the present investigation.

<sup>26</sup> Thucydides exhibits the "robust empiricism" (Fränkel 1974/1925) of Xenophanes, but greater confidence that exact observation can lead to exact understanding (contrast Xenophanes, DK 21 B34); compare Alcmaeon DK B28. Similarly, the medical thinkers also shunned over-arching theory. Note, for example, the criticisms of ὑπόθεσις at the beginning of *Ancient Medicine*; this attitude toward *a priori* theory would later change.



Cochrane has endured much revilement down to the present generation, and the emotional level of the criticism reveals that more is felt to be at stake than an understanding of one fifth-century historian. The debate has practically polarized around labels: Thucydides is either the least or most objective of all ancient historians, a scientist without emotion or a passionate artist without science, a promoter of rational and intelligent control of human affairs or a propounder of the irrational and unpredictable in history as bounds to the power of intelligence, even an absolute truth-teller or a tendentious fabricator.<sup>27</sup> The categories which have developed and are still developing are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive, and ironically betray a rather outdated notion of “science” and its relation to the emotions. Thucydides may adopt an empirical and analytical approach to historical data learned from medical treatises of his time, while at the same time adopting an artistic narrative style and maintaining an emotional investment in his subject. The Peloponnesian War was not assigned him as a topic for a “prize essay,” but was chosen by himself as the most significant event to investigate and interpret. That in itself indicates deep personal involvement without reflecting negatively on the quality of the investigation. Are theoretical physicists searching with excitement for a “Theory of Everything,” or biological researchers deciphering the codes of nature or trying to abolish epidemics, required to suppress emotion (much less individual creativity) in order to remain objective enough to pursue their science?<sup>28</sup>

Thucydides wrote history. That is a simple enough statement, but one which excludes science, art, ethics and philosophy as his

<sup>27</sup> Among the more important recent demonstrations of the more artistic, emotional and subjective sides of Thucydides are, first, de Romilly 1956a and Stahl 1966, to whom most of the following criticisms do not apply; Edmunds 1975a and 1975b, Parry (all titles cited in bibliography), Grant 1974, Hunter 1973. For an illuminating discussion, as well as reference to other works not mentioned here, see Ostwald 1988, 56–7, also Connor 1977, whose coinage “post-modernist Thucydides” has now gained considerable currency; Connor’s thoughtful essay of 1985 points the way to a more nuanced appreciation, and see in a parallel vein Hornblower 1994.

<sup>28</sup> The plethora of books in the past two decades by natural scientists for lay audiences contains ample enough evidence that emotional involvement, creativity, artistry and philosophical speculation – in short, the attributes which are supposed to have conflicted with Thucydides’ scientific pretensions – accompany the practice of “pure” science. Two of the best writers have been H. Pagels (see e.g. *The Dreams of Reason* [1988], *passim*) and L. Thomas (e.g., *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony* [1980], esp. 68–80, 143–55).



primary occupation. Surely his composition contains elements of all of these, but cannot be singularly defined by any one of them. My claim here is also fairly simple: in his model of *stasis* Thucydides adopted a method and conceptual framework learned from contemporary science. Moreover, Thucydides maintains a firm command over both facts and language – the raw material and technique of his art – in the *stasis* model. The historian even of contemporary events cannot always rely on his own observations, but must gather information from a variety of sources, the most troublesome being human witnesses. This limitation is admitted at the outset of the *History* (1.22.2–3) and is repeated on other occasions (5.68.2, 7.44.1, cf. 7.71). But, again, such uncertainty is nowhere evident in Thucydides' unflinching account of *stasis*, and one may assume that since the historian had numerous opportunities personally to witness *staseis* in the Hellenic cities, he relied primarily on his own observations, confirmed by those of other informants, when constructing his model.

Second, it should be noted that another component of medical theory is conspicuously absent in the model of *stasis*, namely the definition of health as an equilibrium of forces. This departure is surprising because the direct connection between a medical and a political theory, one imagines, would have appealed to Thucydides. The idea, developed by natural scientists and political philosophers both before and after Socrates, is that a proper balance of forces – in an organism, political system, the cosmos – produces health (or even the act of creation itself, as Empedocles thought), and a disproportion characterizes illness. A prominent example is Alcmaeon of Croton, whose teachings would probably have been known to Thucydides. In one fragment he is quoted as saying (DK 24 B4):

The essential bond of health is the “equal rights” (ἰσονομία) of the forces, moist and dry, cold and hot, bitter and sweet, and the rest, whereas the single rule (μοναρχία) [of one element] among them is the cause of disease; the single rule of any of them is harmful.

Alcmaeon goes on to explain that the imbalance can arise from both *internal* and *external* sources. Unlike medical writers, who use the word *krasis* to signify the proper balance of powers in a healthy system, Alcmaeon uses a political metaphor which philosophers of his time had adopted to understand the cosmos; political real-



ities aided his insight into nature, and probably *vice versa*. As in Heraclitus and Anaximander, Democritus also wrote along the same lines.<sup>29</sup> Thucydides was not unaware of this theory (cf. 8.97.2: μετρία ξύγκρασις, on the régime of the Five Thousand), but as we will see, his concept of *stasis* involves not the elevation of one element in a body politic above the others, that is, a disproportionate strength or weakness in one or more elements, but the corruption of the essential elements, and consequently of the entire body.

#### THE GENESIS AND EFFECTS OF *STASIS*

In four balanced, parallel sentences, Thucydides leads the reader from the extremes of the *stasis* in Corcyra to the outbreak of *stasis* in the Hellenic world, and thence to the universal human condition. The description of the events of the Corcyrean *stasis* is never abandoned, but it is broadened and generalized. The precisely parallel structure of these sentences (3.82.1–2) may be schematized:

<u>82.1A</u>	<u>82.2A</u>
1. Specific instance to general condition	
Corcyra → Hellas: “it was the first of that time, . . . later the whole Hellenic world . . .”	Hellas → Human history: “the cities in <i>stasis</i> . . . which occur and will always occur . . .”
2. Character of more general condition	
“there being contentions in each city”	“more intense or milder . . .”
<u>82.1B</u>	<u>82.2B</u>
Cause of general condition: changes produced in war	
a. In peacetime (ἐν μὲν εἰρήνῃ) such behavior impossible	a. In peacetime (ἐν μὲν γὰρ εἰρήνῃ) such behavior impossible
b. In wartime (πολεμουμένων δέ) such behavior possible	b. In wartime (ὁ δὲ πόλεμος) such behavior possible

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hussey 1985. For the idea of proper balance and mixture, see further *Ancient Medicine* 14 and 19, *Nature of Man* 4; and cf. Ar. *Pol.* 5 1301a. McKinney 1964 provides a critical survey, as well as an explanation for the absence of the term, if not the concept, of *isonomia* in Greek medical writings; cf. also Longrigg 1993, 52. On the term *isonomia* in political contexts, see Ostwald 1969, 96–160, departing from the important work by Vlastos 1964 and 1953; also Raaflaub 1985, 115–17.



It seems otiose, but, given the still-prevalent trend to find imperfection in every Thucydidean repetition, it is necessary to say that the A–B–A–B structure of this small section can only have been intentional, carefully planned and subtly written. The first sentence of each pair broadens the focus from a specific instance to a more general condition, and the precise parallels demonstrate in strikingly concrete fashion that what was true for the single city, Corcyra, was true for all Hellas at that time, and will be true in all times and places. The identical underlying structures and nature of events are evident in sentence structure and sequence of thought. The perceptive eye, says Thucydides, learns to identify the essential elements and ignore the inessential, time-bound details which vary according to circumstance. The details of the feud which set off the conflict in Corcyra were not repeated in other cities of Hellas, which, however, all called in Athens or Sparta in the name of democracy or oligarchy; and even a nominal struggle between democracy and oligarchy will not perforce be repeated in other *staseis* elsewhere and at other times, but the many attending calamities (πολλὰ καὶ χαλεπὰ κατὰ στάσιν), in varying degrees, will be.

The reason for the predicted repetition of behavior in all *staseis* is given in the second sentences of each pair; appropriately, 82.1B still refers to the situation in Hellas, while 82.2B offers the same analysis in general terms, free of any particular context.<sup>30</sup> Both sentences explain the ones preceding them by showing how people behave differently under varying conditions, specifically war and peace. In the first sentence (82.1A–B),<sup>31</sup> Thucydides says that in

<sup>30</sup> The transitional word “and” (καί) in 82.1B has practically the same sense as the transitional “for” (γάρ) in 82.2B.

<sup>31</sup> Which is itself in A–B–A–B form: “no pretext” and “not prepared” correspond, respectively, to “an alliance was available” and “a facile matter.” The “available alliances” as well as the destructive purposes described were obviously created by the war. Many have objected to the unusual syntax of this sentence, in particular the lack of a verb in the μέν clause and, if the genitive absolutes remain, the lack of a copula (ὄντων) for ἐτοίμων. Among the suggested emendations has been ἐτόλμων for ἐτοίμων, which creates further grammatical difficulties; Marshall’s emendation (1990) of οὐδ’ ἐτοίμων το οὐδετέρων is inspired by his belief that ἐτοίμων “does not add much to the sense,” which I hope to disprove: it is rather a key concept. While the grammar of the sentence remains strange, and to pedants embarrassing, Thucydides’ meaning is clear to all, and the genitive absolutes in the μέν and δέ clauses lend a certain force to the intended contrast. The anacoluthon forces readers to go back over the sentence and read it more carefully. Marshall cites previous bibliography, cf. esp. Classen’s note *ad loc.*, and see also Macleod 1979, 53 and 65 n. 5.



peacetime “they would not have been prepared” (οὐκ ἂν ... ἐτοιμῶν) to use external alliances for internally destructive purposes, the plain sense of which is that faction-members would not have been mentally disposed, that is, the idea would hardly have entered their minds, to introduce the two great warring powers into the competitions in their own cities.

This seems an odd thing to say, but it is corroborated and explained further by two passages in the model: (1) the later statement that the *stasiotai* “were ready (ἐτοῖμοι) to satisfy their lust to dominate by seizing power through either an unjust vote of condemnation or brute force” (82.8), describing a readiness to commit acts unthinkable in normal times; and closer to home, (2) its parallel in the section, i.e. the second sentence (82.2A–B): in peacetime, states and individuals have “better γνώμαι,” which are overpowered when their ὀργαί are brought down to a crude level in wartime. The word γνώμη here embraces the variety of meanings of the word: mental disposition, thought, judgment and purpose; that is, in line with the word’s derivation from the aorist root of γιγνώσκω (signifying a process of perception and cognition), a decision or conviction reached after careful thought and deliberation. By contrast, ὀργαί are strong emotions, passions which circumvent or overwhelm rational processes.<sup>32</sup> Thus the focus is on what happens *internally* to living organisms, both states and individuals, during *stasis*, and the contrast is between the prevalence of mental powers and faculties of judgment (γνώμαι) in times of security and raw emotion (ὀργαί) in times of stress and violence. When good γνώμαι prevail, the object of competing political groups is *not* the harm and distress (κάκωσις) of their rivals, over and above their mere defeat, or the revolutionary exploitation of the system to achieve those ends (νεωτερίζειν).<sup>33</sup> Thucydides will

<sup>32</sup> All the examples of γνώμη in Thucydides as well as some other fifth-century authors are collected and analyzed by Huart 1973. On the contrast between γνώμη and ὀργή, see Edmunds 1975a, 11–15; on γνώμη and healthy political process, Farrar 1988, 153–87. Of course, not all instances will fit the patterns elucidated here, e.g. γνώμη at 6.49.2.

<sup>33</sup> I have translated τοῖς νεωτερίζειν τι βουλευμένοις not, as commonly, “for those desiring revolution,” but “for them as they desired some revolutionary change,” because the phrase is not a subset of but explains ἐκαστέροις. That is, those partisans who called in Athens and Sparta were the ones desiring to revolutionize the state; they were not existing elements suppressed in times of peace, but were created by the conditions which led to *stasis*.



develop the theme of the deterioration of reason and judgment in *stasis* more fully at the end of the analysis, where the word γνώμη returns, although with a slightly different meaning (83.3; see below). Likewise, the theme of the take-over of crude emotional reactions will also be developed (82.7–8) when Thucydides demonstrates how during *stasis* revenge, which is closely related in Greek literature to ὀργή, governs all political and even inter-personal relations.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Thucydides says that war changes men internally, transforming their minds and emotions to make them capable of things which they not only would avoid in times of peace and prosperity, but which would not even *occur* to them.<sup>35</sup> This is expressed in the next sentence (82.3), which serves as a transition to the careful record and analysis of symptoms: “So the cities were embroiled in *stasis*, and those that were afflicted later, influenced by knowledge of previous instances, far outstripped the others in the invention of plans . . .”<sup>36</sup> The syntax of this sentence is notoriously difficult, and it has been “corrected” by critics from Dionysius to the modern cadre of emenders. Yet the text is sound, and no change is required. The main difficulty can be resolved by realizing that the first neuter subject refers to the affairs of the cities (ἔστασίαζε . . . τὰ τῶν πόλεων), while the second represents the *people and their actions* in the cities (τὰ ἐφυστερίζοντα . . . ἐπέφερε), for only people (not events) could go to “much further extremes, both in the ingenuity of their attacks and in the enormity of their acts of revenge.” Thus the language is highly compressed, with a point. As Macleod astutely observes, Thucydides “systematically avoids distinguishing persons from events. This aptly reinforces the notion

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Thuc. 6.57.3 (Harmodius and Aristogeiton extracted vengeance δι’ ὀργῆς) and 3.38.1, and compare Ar. *Rhet.* 1.369b 12: διὰ θυμὸν δὲ καὶ ὀργὴν τὰ τιμωρητικά. Aesch. *Eum.* 980ff. portrays revenge as a part of *stasis*. Cf. Diesner 1956, 125–6.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Thrasymachus DK 85 B1 (apparently talking about the Athenian *stasis*). Cic. *Fam.* 4.9.3 comes close to illustrating the changed psychological state described by Thucydides: *omnia sunt misera in bellis civilibus, . . . sed miserius nihil quam ipsa victoria; quae etiam si ad meliores venit, tamen eos ipsos ferociores impotentioresque reddit, ut, etiam si natura tales non sint, necessitate esse cogantur*. This is the tormented voice of one who lived through a prolonged civil war.

<sup>36</sup> ἔστασίαζε τε οὖν τὰ τῶν πόλεων, καὶ τὰ ἐφυστερίζοντά που πύσσει [Dion.: ἐπιπύσσει] τῶν προγενομένων πολὺ ἐπέφερε τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ καινοῦσθαι τὰς διανοίας . . . For the purpose of discussion, my translation here is more literal than my attempt at the beginning of the chapter to bring out the meaning of the sentence.